

House Passes Braley Plain Language Act

Bill Would

Require Government to Write Tax Forms, Other Documents in Easy-to-Understand, Simple Language

Benefits of Health Care Reform, Congressional District Fact Sheet

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, DC - As part of Sunshine Week, the House today passed Rep. Bruce Braley's (D-Iowa) Plain Language Act (HR 946), which will require the federal government to write documents, such as tax returns, federal college aid applications, and Veterans Administration forms in simple, easy-to-understand language. The bill passed the House by a widely bipartisan margin of 386-33. Sunshine Week is a national initiative to open a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information.

"There is no reason why the federal government can't write these forms and other public documents in a way we can all understand," Braley said. "Writing government documents in plain language will increase government accountability and will save Americans time and money. Plain, straightforward language makes it easy for taxpayers to understand what the federal government is doing and what services it is offering.

"The Plain Language Act requires a simple change to business-as-usual that'll make a big difference for anyone who's ever filled out a tax return or received a government document. This bill shows what bipartisanship can accomplish when we put aside our differences and work together for the common good."

The Plain Language Act requires the federal government to write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in a "clear, concise, well-organized" manner that follows the best practices of plain language writing.

Braley introduced the bill in February 2009. A companion bill introduced by Senators Daniel Akaka (D-HI) and George Voinovich (R-OH) was passed by a Senate committee in December.

Examples of Plain
Language in Use: Before and After

Here are three before-and-after examples of how plain language was applied to federal documents to make them easier to understand. For more examples, see <http://www.plainlanguage.gov>.

Example #1: Medicare Fraud Letter (click link)

http://www.plainlanguage.gov/examples/before_after/medicarefraudltr.cfm

Example #2: FDA drug warning label (click link)

http://www.plainlanguage.gov/examples/before_after/overctrdrug.pdf

Example #3: IRS form (click links)

Before: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/examples/before_after/CP2000_before.pdf

After: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/examples/before_after/CP2000_after.pdf

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